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Luminous

April E. Fisher

Winner of the Prize for Creative
Non-Fiction in the 2004
Creative Writing Competition
Sponsored by the UNF Writing Program
and the Department of English.

Memories are like the falling of leaves: some decaying, some solitary, some lost or hidden under a pile of others, all in no order.

A girl who's experienced twenty years of living is writing in her twin bed. She remembers when two days ago (or was it three?) he turned to her in the hallway of building ten and said, "Don't take this the wrong way, but it's like you're raping my mind."

Taking on a female body (a first, or a second) you, Reader, take me in. Trusting what I will do once I enter, spread yourself open, and pull me into your sacred parts. What will happen once my pen, my ink, penetrate the surface? Reader: Lover: Feel impregnated, but do not fear: I am here because I want to care for you. I am a violent and tender lover, but please don't stop. What could be sweeter than this intercourse?

*

In anamnesis we are magicians that recreate the past in the present, and so even though it was then, I see this boy now.

The albino child is in front of me. He finds the same fascination in my phone battery, color ink, and keyboard as I do in his skin, hair, and actions: so different from normalcy, that they seem fake. This Wal-Mart checkout counter is his playground. He turns the items over in his hands and squints, as if they're too

bright for his eyes. He draws his face closer, as if otherwise he'll miss something.

"Leave those things alone," his mother says, after a full minute of play. "Why?" he demands.

"She's going to buy them," she responds, as if that's the real answer to the question.

If I could, I'd turn him around and stare at his face for an hour. I'd pinch his skin and run my fingers through his wall-white hair. I'd spin him around and around, like the battery pack in his hands. I'd compare him to a telephone booth, scissors, and my mother. Then, I'd write him a story:

Once upon a black river, in a dark forest, under a lightless sky, floated a feather white as a wall and bright like a light. It changed black to browns and floated onto shore, stopping here, at this old man's feet.

The man mumbles and stares, eyes full, mouth cracked open, and bends over the feather; he touches it and pulls his hand back with uncertainty. When it's clear no harm will be done to either of them, he picks the feather up and rests it in his palms. He watches as tears fall around the feather and he says into the silence of the forest:

"I thought I was blind...I thought ...I'm not...I'm not! I can see! I thought I was blind, but, no! Ha! Sight! Sight, I love you! Beautiful feather!" He jumps around his forest, do-si-dos with the trees, kisses leaves, laughs. All the while guided by the luminous feather, all the while crying and crying out. All the while surrounded by newly chirping birds and growling bears, running deer and jumping squirrels:

"I can see."

*

As I try to fall asleep, I try to breathe solidly so the things that would try to break inside of me can't. I glare at the ruffle in the curtains separating bedroom from hallway. I glare at the too-big shadow above my reading chair; I glare at the red light that blinks white in my peripheral vision. The room is alive with movement that my eyes can't seem to catch: it's too quick for me. Last night, this sequence progressed until I had no choice but to sleep with the light on. An unreal, half-conscious sleep, but one protected from the instability of my nighttime, child-again mind.

The clock says two thirty-seven, and I write in my head for a while, then give in and pull out my one subject notebook.

In the morning I'll want to erase this, but I won't. I've never been able to conceal any part of the Truth. It escapes through my fingertips. Or else my hands ache and it radiates from my being in unnatural behaviors.

"I don't want to mislead you," Brian said, many hours before.

And I, looking at him, said without words, *you just did*, and, I hope, *please don't*.

It's okay. No matter how much care is intended, we can't help but hurt each other. This is how nature is - unable to prevent leading me into the comfort of the dark, where creatures imagined move me to pull the covers all the way up to my chin.

He sighs his regret and I wonder: Does Mother Nature ache when she destroys herself in hurricanes and floods? Does she cry, as her creatures suffer on top of her erupting body?

*

Read this slowly, my Beloved, or you'll miss something. Be still. Lie down. Lie down, please, right now. Stop reading until you do. Please.

In moments like this one, as we lie together, I feel as if you don't lie with me.

An ex-love once told me, Reader, that he couldn't look in my eyes or else he'd fall into them. A friend told me that I am so rawly open, she is almost embarrassed to look in my face. My mother told me I am vulnerable. They have all looked on me with kindness.

Will you care for me? Will you, my Love, when I lie exposed before you?

*

The bathroom is a double identity. Both covetous and hateful, it's here that the revelation takes place. I can see a girl and a fallen leaf, picked and pulled apart.

She doesn't want the world to know, but perhaps it's okay to tell you: the girl who is in this place, who must be eighteen or nineteen, pulls her shirt off over her head to see that her arms have changed color. The marks are purple and she touches them lightly, pulls at her skin, to see if the dark spots are really on her arms. Only weeks after professing he'd never hit a girl, she wonders if J.D.'s face looks as different to him as her skin does to her. She leans into the mirror and wipes away sweat. In her body is a shake and denial and in her mind is a dream:

The sandy headed girl wakes up with wings.

It is out of the ordinary, but since everything seems out of the ordinary to her, she takes this to be one of the pleasant surprises of life. She walks to her hole-in-the-wall window and peers out to the village around her. Muddy

streets, clay houses, donkeys. This morning the sky decided to be purple, so Elizabeth laughs. This morning, the sun is

yellow and the clouds gray. Elizabeth sings: "Into the sea the men did meet with fishes, gulls, and sails, and into the sky, they wandered high to tell each other tales..." She pauses and looks at her glowing wings. She steps onto the windowsill and is just about to jump when she hears her mother's voice:

"Lizzy! Lizzy, get down; you'll fall!" Her mother's outside, rubbing her eyes, as if they're playing tricks on her.

"Lizzy. . .you have wings?"

The girl smiles and squeals as she jumps off of her window, opens her wings, and flies to the purple sky.

But, when the other girl awakens, the sky isn't purple, and her arms are turning green. She leans her arms on the counter and looks down into the sink. This bathroom is her hiding place. This bathroom is where she discovers each new bruise. She stand in the shadowy place and looks to the half of the room the window lets sun onto. It drifts onto the tile, this pale illumination in the air, stopping several feet before it reaches her. With the motionless dark around her body, looking at the window makes her eyes water. She rubs her arm and puts her shirt back on. This bathroom is a penumbra and I'm afraid to step outside.

*

Our bodies are remarkably human his Christmas. Mine is inhabited with strep throat, my cousin's and her daughter's with the flu. Casey and Rose, hot in body and in temper, leave the house only for visits to the doctor.

The child has forgotten about me. No running around the house, petting the doggy, spinning in the air with Cousin Apple today.

(I? Was it me all along then?)

*

In any given day, women are beaten and the Universe births grapefruits.

On this day a grapefruit has made its way to my computer desk-dinner table. It sits there on top of a paper towel:

I grasp it; throw it in the air; catch it in my left hand and sink. My. Nail. Into its thick skin. I rip off the outer layer.

It's naked in my hands; I split it open, revealing the inner fruit: it waits for me to burst it open. I run my tongue along the tiny bumps and pull the fruit into my mouth with teeth and tongue. I slowly apply pressure. The cool juice trickles over my tongue and teeth and I can't help but: "Mmmmmm."

*

You don't believe that I'm here with you? Then lean closer. Put your face to the page. Don't you smell me? I'm in each of these words you see.

Reader, only the best of things will happen if you invite me inside.

You should read each of these curves like blackberries: Juicy and perfect inside of your mouth. No one's looking, I promise, go ahead: turn your lips purple over my words.

I sit in the living room. The rocking chair, the coffee table, the TV, and soft rosy carpet: they're all here, but in my mind all is absent but the book in front of me.

But then:

I hear Rose crying, *I'm sorry*, she's on the floor, held down, Casey yells, *Take the Medicince, Rose!* The child squeals, *I'm sorry, I'm sorry!* Oh, oh god is the child screaming, *I'm sorry?*

My book is on the floor; I sob in the bathroom. "I'm sorry." "I'm sorry." Echoes.

The world and my stomach unsettle.

The angel-girl descends from the sun-colored sky with sky-colored clouds into a meadow town. Grass reaches mid-calf on the villagers. Homes are palm huts here. A woman points to the sky: "An angel! An angel!"

The village below gathers and the girl with wings smiles as she descends. One glittering feather falls from her wing and a boy catches it in his hands. He starts to jump and laugh.

"What do you call this color?" he asks, and Angel-girl replies:

"White."

"Nothing is so happy and glorious as the color white!" he shouts, "Nothing is so fantastic and joyous as the color white!" he sings.

A little girl steps closer to the divine creature and says, "Angel, may I have a feather, so I can be happy like him?" The Angel plucks out one feather and hands it to the little girl, who immediately embraces the feather and spins in circles.

"Could I have one too, please?" says a woman.

The Angel gets lost in the joy the white feathers bring to the villagers, until she realizes she no longer has wings. It's no matter to her, though, because the happiness of the strange people is better, she thinks, than being able to fly.

She holds one last feather in her hand and watches as the people spin, jump, and sing with their feathers: "the color white!" they shout, "an angel's feather!" they yell.

Until, the angel notices, the boy has stopped.

"What's wrong?" she asks him.

"I'm tired of the color white," he says. "Here; you can have your feather back." The Angel sees she isn't a mythical creature anymore. The people around her stop dancing. "It isn't supposed to happen this way," she thinks. "But look how they glimmer," she says. She says: "Don't they sparkle?" as, one by one, they return her feathers to her. She whispers, "I'm sorry they don't glow." She stands in the strange green land, with feathers instead of wings, and pictures her clay house and purple sky.

*

I imagine that the first time I heard the word "Mom," it was fantastically odd and meaningless and beautiful.

Mom mom mom mom mom mom.

Now, after hearing it thousands of times: mom mom mom mom mom mom, it's strange again. Mom mom mom mom. Why is that? Is it me, or the word that's changed?

*

Our relationship is new, Reader. So perhaps you touch this page like a secret love: only in chance encounters. The unintentional – and too rare – extra step that has drawn our bodies so close.

Or, perhaps you're more direct than that. Perhaps you hold the page in your hands, rush to the end, make it entirely yours, steal each kiss.

But I say do neither of these. Approach me as you would a romance that has had time to grow comfortable, but not tired. Turn off the noise, Reader. Feel your eyes relax, as if that person is beneath you on the bed. I want you to stare. Press yourself against these words. Imagine their taste.

The soft skin that covers your lover's body has been distanced from your eyes with a sheet as white as this page. Although you've read everything before, seen every inch, slowly pull the covers off.

*

The sun's caught in a maze of water. It throws itself about, and I, a child under its rim, do the same. Water is liquid room with a scintillating ceiling.

A moment before; the Hand forces me under. Reaching from the chair, the grown-up is a heavy hand on my head. Water is a blurry depth that should only reach should high.

A moment ago, the boy ducks his head under, three times, *it's easy*. Water is moisture on the tiny bumps on the side of the pool I run my fingers across.

A moment ago: the overseer is saying, "If you want to stay in the pool, you have to go *under*." Water is shadow at night, before falling into a lucid nightmare with strange, scintillating borders.

A moment before is unknown. A moment after is:

"See, now that wasn't so bad, was it?"

Cool air around me announces spots on my body I never knew existed. I watch the other children play from the safe surroundings of a towel and concrete. The water sparkles differently now that I know what I know about the sun. It's not in the sky: it's right here, you just have to look for it.

The little girl I once was lays her body down. She puts her head on the cool concrete and watches the water.

A different little girl gathers feathers in her arms right now. I want to tell you, Reader, that the white feathers are scattered in the grass: some are decaying, some are solitary, some are

lost or hidden under a pile of others, and all are in no order. When Lizzy has all she can carry, she walks out of the town through tall and taller grass, until she reaches a forest. It's dark; she's terrified. But, she goes anyway until the only light around her comes from the sun-infused feathers. She stops at a black river.

She wishes she never had wings, and throws herself into the current.

*

I just bonded with a bug. In between that last paragraph and this one. A little tiny black thing. He was twitching around on the part of my desk that holds my keyboard, and I was afraid he was dying. So, I put my finger beside him and he jumped onto it. Then he zoomed around on his ground – my skin. Then he played a little, I thing, jumping from one hand to the other, one finger to the other, racing around. I tried to let him out the window but he wouldn't go. He dropped to the floor, so now I'm afraid to walk over there. I wonder what it must be like to be blown around by the wind. To be forced to trust the giant Universe.

*

You're falling in love with the Writer. If you had her number, you'd call her up. Didn't she give you her number? You, here it is: 620-5796. You wonder if you could call her up and say, "I just remembered/who you are. I just remembered/I love you."

It's the act of unforgotten things you never knew. You read over this very sentence. No, this one. You daydream about a conversation with this strange creator. She daydreams about you daydreaming about a conversation, and then writes it down. In the conversation, she tells you a story:

"Once upon a black river, in a dark forest, under a lightless sky, floated

a feather white as a wall and bright like a light.”

*

You may say it's been twenty years and nine months, and that isn't a very long time, but really it's been the age of the Universe. As you look into this tiny bedroom scene, look onto this spot here on my lips. This piece of matter was once a stop sign was once any eye lash was once the point all things exploded from. So, really, I've been waiting eternity for this first kiss. He asks, and I'm uncertain of the events that follow, but I am certain that my eyelash-stop sign – god is a good combination with his owl wing-air-god.

Has every part of the Universe kissed every other?

Reader (to Writer): “If life isn't ordinary, I think you should kiss me.”

“Open your eyes,” I say, “We're already making love.”